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SUBJECT: BASRAH BADR LEADER PREDICTS SOME BADR-JAM ELECTION VIOLENCE

CLASSIFIED BY: Won Lee, A/Director, U.S. Regional Embassy

Office, Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Hasan al-Rashid, Basrah's Badr leader, told the Regional Embassy Office IPAO that provincial elections might occur in September assuming passage of key legislation in Baghdad. He did not rule out violent political confrontation in Basrah during the campaign season between the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI)/Badr Organization and their Sadrists rivals, but said it was more likely in other areas. Despite the Sadrists recent efforts to improve their image, he claimed they were preparing to eliminate political rivals while simultaneously preparing their own candidates for election. Al-Rashid also complained that Basrah's military leaders continue to keep the Provincial Council in the dark on their plans and suggested periodic strikes against the militias to keep them on their back-foot and from building up. End summary.

¶2. (C) Provincial Council (PC) member, former Basrah governor, and Badr leader Hasan al-Rashid met February 3 with Regional Embassy Office IPAO. Recently returned from a State Department sponsored International Visitor Program on Elections, al-Rashid told us that what he learned would help him prepare ISCI/Badr for provincial elections, which he anticipated for September. Iraqis, he said, were hopeful elections would occur this year, but it was essential for the Council of Representatives to pass the Elections and Provincial Powers Laws first. ISCI/Badr were prepared to wait for the passage of those laws and would not push for elections without them.

¶3. (C) According to al-Rashid, ISCI/Badr preferred an open-list ballot system and it was better for Basrah's democracy. But, a closed-list might be required at this stage in Iraq's budding democracy as Iraqis simply were not ready to choose for themselves. Iraqis knew the party leaders, but there were unknown, yet well-qualified party members that might be overlooked in an open-list system.

¶4. (C) Al-Rashid also told us that it was likely the Badr-led Islamic bloc of parties in the PC, known as the Basrah Islamic List (BIL) would go their separate ways in the next election. BIL turned out to be dysfunctional, he said, because managing the egos of BIL's other party leaders was too difficult and they never developed a unified agenda.

¶5. (C) Responding to our query, al-Rashid did not expect the rivalry between ISCI/Badr and the Sadrists to turn violent in Basrah during the election, but he did not rule it out entirely. Such confrontation was more likely in other areas like Nasiriyah and Karbala. He claimed Badr already had indications

that the Sadrists were developing hit-lists to eliminate political opponents during the campaigning. Basrah's Sadrists were "behaving better," engaging more politically, trying to improve their image, and preparing their candidates with the necessary credentials to run for office.

¶6. (C) On a separate note, al-Rashid commented that the PC's strained relationship with Basrah Operations Commander LTG Mohan Hafith Fahad and Chief of Police Jalil Khalaf Shuwayl was only marginally better. He mostly blamed Mohan for being too conceited and failing to apprise the PC's security committee of his plans. While the lull in attacks within the city was helpful, al-Rashid opined that Mohan needed to periodically hit some targets to keep the militias in line and prevent them from getting stronger. Al-Rashid said he was meeting Mohan and Jalil that night to encourage a more aggressive stance and to institutionalize their relationship with the PC.

¶7. (C) Comment: By dissolving the BIL, ISCI/Badr is likely positioning itself to win more seats on the PC. They are better organized than many other parties, and by running independently, they will not have to share a percentage of the seats they win with candidates from other parties who run on the BIL list. Ever the Machiavellian, al-Rashid's suggestion to keep the closed-list ballots is likely a play to maintain his personal control over his party by emplacing "yes-men" under him in the PC. End comment.

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